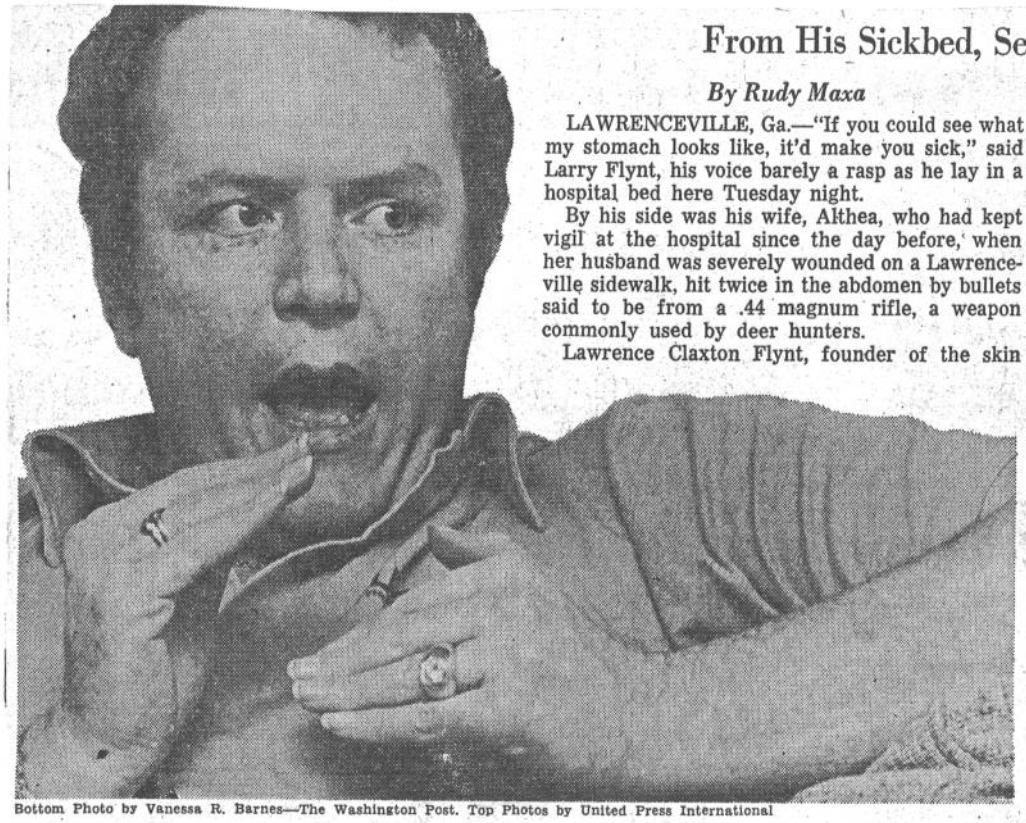
Larry Flynt's Conspiracy Theory



Bottom Photo by Vanessa R. Barnes—The Washington Post. Top Photos by United Press International

Larry Flynt, above, and top, left to right: Al Goldstein of Screw magazine talking to Flynt lawyer Harold Fahringer; Althea Flynt, and Ruth Carter Stapleton.

From His Sickbed, Sermons and Speculation

By Rudy Maxa

LAWRENCEVILLE, Ga.—"If you could see what my stomach looks like, it'd make you sick," said Larry Flynt, his voice barely a rasp as he lay in a hospital bed here Tuesday night.

By his side was his wife, Althea, who had kept vigil at the hospital since the day before, when her husband was severely wounded on a Lawrenceville sidewalk, hit twice in the abdomen by bullets said to be from a .44 magnum rifle, a weapon commonly used by deer hunters.

Lawrence Claxton Flynt, founder of the skin magazine Hustler, recent convert to born-again Christendom and friend of President Carter's sister, had also become a vegetarian—and, later, a fruitarian.

He would fast, sometimes in the Bahamas with Dick Gregory. And in the days before he was shot, as his trial for obscenity was drawing to a close at the courthouse here, he was fasting again.

On Monday, the day of the shooting, he had lunched only on grapefruit juice at a cafeteria two blocks from the courthouse.

And the day before, in keeping with his routine,

See FLYNT, B3, Col. 1

. . . Meanwhile, Police Search For Any Leads

By Mindy Fetterman

Special to The Washington Post

LAWRENCEVILLE, Ga.—With the dismissal yesterday of suspect Teddy Morris of Norfolk, Va., police say they are left with few solid leads in the shooting of Larry Flynt, the Hustler publisher who was seriously wounded here Monday.

Morris was arrested in Norfolk Tuesday night after Gwinette County police received a telephone call indicating he was a possible suspect.

Police flew to Norfolk to question Morris, who was being held in the city jail there after he refused to sign extradition papers to Georgia. But by noon Wednesday the lead had fallen through.

See INVESTIGATION, B3, Col. 2

THE WASHINGTON POST
Thurs., March 9, 1978 B 3

United Press International

Althea Flynt meeting with newsmen in Lawrenceville.

Larry Flynt, Theorizing About

FLYNT, From B1

he had had two enemas. His doctors said those enemas probably helped seve his life. When the bullets tore up his intestines, his digestive tract was relatively empty, thus decreasing the chance of infection.

Flynt is convinced the attempt on his life was the work of an assassination team with ties to the government. The motive: to silence his inquiry into the JFK killing. Even on his sickbed, still on the critical list, with paralysis of his legs still a possibility, Flynt took the opportunity to crusade:

"If this will focus enough attention on the concept of obscenity, maybe we can truly have a free press in this country . . . . One single thing that has hurt the most—the American people wouldn't believe me when I said I was willing to die for the concepts on which our country was founded. If the apathetic American people can be woken up we can solve a lot of social problems and make this a less violent world."

His wife asked him to save the sermons. Flynt asked the doctor if he could sip some water; the corners of his mouth were cracked and dry. No, said his doctor, but perhaps he could have a Life Saver to freshen his mouth.

"Has that got sugar in it?" Flynt asked.

"Well, yes, but that will do you some good," answered the doctor.

"We're vegetarians, we don't eat sugar," said Althea.

Flynt nodded in agreement as the doctor, smiling tolerantly, pointed to the glucose bag above the bed that dripped sugar into Flynt's bloodstream.

Fears and Problems

Two weeks ago Los Angeles sunlight streamed through the rear window of Larry Flynt's limousine. The Hustler founder was headed for a Culver City photo studio where women posed for explicit nudes that made Flynt infamous and wealthy.

"You know," Flynt, 35, said that day in a world-weary Kentucky drawl, "I don't know why I don't forget this other stuff and live in Acapulco with the profits from Hustler."

For all the West Coast sunshine, the limousines, the private jets, the bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel, for all the publicity of new friendships with born-again household names, Larry Flynt was beset with problems.

He was besieged by media requests for interviews about his religious experience several months ago. In an urge to find some respectability and a larger meaning to life than Hustler perhaps represents, Flynt recently began a dash to build a media empire consisting of a dozen urban tabloids fashioned after the Village Voice, a chain of city and state magazines modeled after Texas Monthly, and a weekly news magazine.

He acquired tabloids in Plains, Atlanta and Los Angeles. His first foray into straight magazine publishing was a month away, when Ohio magazine would debut. The new properties were causing cash flow problems.

On this afternoon, as the long black car traveled through Culver City's faded business district, Flynt spied a corner sporting goods store. He smiled as he pointed it out to his wife: why, he asked, don't we just buy that store and settle down, sell tennis shoes from behind the counter.

In addition to his business problems all was not grim: Hustler's sales continued strongly), Flynt was becoming consumed by assassination conspiracy theories. With veteran assassination buffs Mark Lane and comedian Dick Gregory as his mentors, Flynt embarked on a campaign to solve the murder of John F. Kennedy. He offered a $1-million reward for information leading to the solving of what he thinks was a conspiracy involving the FBI and CIA to kill the president. He published a million copies of a tabloid on the subject. He bankrolled a seven-person investigative team, with Lane at its head, to follow leads around the country.

And then there were the legal battles. He expected a Cincinnati conviction for publishing obscenity to be overturned on appeal, but he faced trials in Atlanta and a rural Georgia town of 7,000 named Lawrenceville.

Traveling With Bodyguards

Flynt begin worrying about his personal safety as his legal fights and religious conversion put him on the nation's front pages. To his friends, he acknowledged the possibility of assassination. In addition to a traveling retinue of aides who double as bodyguards, Flynt last month bought a giant schnauzer a black animal whose friendly, bearded face belies an enormous jaw. His name is Magnum. Flynt calls him "the Rev. Magnum Black."

But during a trip home last weekend Flynt told his wife he didn't fear for his safety in Lawrenceville because it seemed so tranquil and pleasant.

A spent shell was reported found near the door of an abandoned building across the street from where Flynt fell, wounded, though police decline to comment on the weapon involved. A clerk at the Sherwin Williams paint store next door says that until five or six years ago the building held a chiropractor's office. It's windows are shattered, doors hang from the hinges. The rear exit leads conveniently through an overgrown back yard to a parking lot. In short, the

Conspiracy

stone building could have been an assassin's lair.

"An identical modus operandi applied in the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King," says Mark Lane, who has spent 14 years studying political assassinations. Since the man who has been financing his latest efforts was shot Monday, Lane has begun conducting his own investigation into the shooting. Only 12 seconds to fire, exist the abandoned building and flee from the hidden parking lot, notes Lane. As police and citizens converge on the scene of the wounded publisher and his lawyer, the gunman escapes easily in the opposite direction, Lane postutates.

Yesterday, two days after the shooting, Lane held a press conference in a motel room. While newspapers have suggested Flynt's volatile combination of porn and religion could well have motivated an attack on his life, Lane wanted to raise the assumption he shares with the Flynts: that the government wants to silence this monied rabbie rouser who suggests Lee Har-
rabble rouser who suggests Lee Har-

Lane did not specifically accuse the FBI or CIA with complicity, but claimed there has been "a deliberate effort to interfere with and destroy the investigation" he has been conducting under Flynt's auspices for a month.

When reporters from the magazines, newspapers and TV stations present expressed skepticism, Lane replied that, "The news media has always been wrong," referring to the mainstream coverage of political assassinations. The Flynt shooting had the earmarks of a sophisticated operation, he argued: "It doesn't look like amateur night in Lawrenceville, Ga."

Shocked at Violence

The small town is shocked by the violence in its midst. Sheriff's deputies guard every hallway in the hospital where wire service reporters spend the night in the lobby.

Flynt, a promoter who never had trouble garnering media attention, finds himself in a play with no script. His wife and an ex-Newsweek correspondent, Andrew Jaffe (hired recently to run Flynt's newspaper division), try to coordinate press conferences and statements. And, in fact, Althea Flynt says Ruth Carter Stapleton says her brother the president is praying for Flynt. The governor of Georgia sent a warm telegram expressing shock.

As he drifted asleep Tuesday night, Flynt asked his wife to stay nearby; he was afraid, he said, that if he stopped breathing no one would notice.